

- Report No. 103
- July-August 1992

Native Women

The clock ticks after midnight. An empty teapot and two dirty mugs clutter the kitchen table. The past hours have been spent listening to a friend's story. Now she's returned to her home after sharing the richness of her life, but also the pain and hurt. The struggles and joys are her own, yet are so similar to others shared by Native and non-Native women across the world.

When presented with the challenge of compiling a Native women's report, a host of issues flooded our minds: land claim settlements, control of education, self-government, reuniting of fractured families and the personal healing of addictions and abuse. Of course it is also the year 1992, and many of us are hearing about Columbus being "discovered on these shores" 500 years ago. Rather than choose any of these issues as a focus it seemed the telling of stories was the way to touch the issues, and allow us to listen to the life experiences of Native women. The telling of stories seems central to maintaining the oral history of Native peoples, with elders passing on legends and memories to younger generations.

In each story shared, there is cause for hope:

- Manimat's resistance against military and other "developments" on her land
- Nishet's determination to continue providing an opportunity for her children to live their way of life in the country



Illustration by Manon Sioui, renowned Huron-Wendat artist, who bases her work on Huron culture and legends. The illustration is entitled "Oxha, l'hiver" ("Winter"). The artist explains the symbolism in this way: "In the Huron-Wendat understanding of the universe, winter is Snowflake on the back of my country, Big Turtle." This illustration was a cover illustration for Rencontre, a Native periodical from Quebec, and is reprinted with permission.

- Beth's struggle for her identity
- Linda's challenge to accept and understand each other as a way for change to occur
- Rose's struggle for healing of sexual abuse
- Suzanne's persistent efforts to find family members taken from her.

This issue also includes poetry and illustrations by Native women, which contribute to the telling of Native stories. The majority of stories in this issue come from one People, the Innu of "Labrador" and "Quebec," as these are the people we, the compilers, know best. Of course not every People could be represented, and many elements of Native women's stories are not mentioned. Also, several women who were asked to contribute found that painful and confusing aspects of their lives were too difficult to share.

Our prayer is that, when ready, many more people will

be able to share stories. Not only is this a part of healing, but it is also a gift—a gift that helps cross barriers and builds understanding.

Native women have many obstacles to overcome, but many women are working and banding together. In Sheshatshit, the community where we live, the women began as the silent and strong movers to stand up, to resist, to change the injustices in their own lives and the lives of their people. They are a

people in transition, needing to come to terms with who they are, when for decades they have been told how to live their lives.

In Ecclesiastes, God reminds us:

"There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven;
a time to weep, a time to laugh,
a time to mourn, and a time to dance."

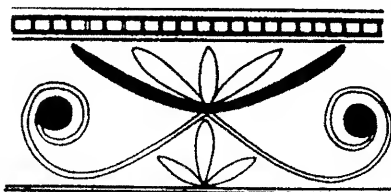
To begin to truly understand each other, we need to weep and laugh together. Our Native sisters' stories have elements of both mourning and dancing.

Should we mourn together? Do we as non-Natives, as newcomers, need to ask forgiveness for our part in the infliction of brokenness on our Native friends? Are we using prayer enough...as our humble response to a situation where we have already "done" too much? Can we pray fervently for commitment to healing, even when we cannot know how this might come? Could the time also be coming for us to dance together in a dance of healing?

—Louise Cober Bauman

Louise Cober Bauman lives in the Innu community of Sheshatshit, Northwest River, Labrador. She, her husband Rick, and their three children are in their third year of an MCC assignment.

Carrie Koplinka Loehr assisted in compiling this report. She, her husband Mike, and their four children are in their first year of an MCC volunteer assignment in the Innu community of Utshimassit [Davis Inlet], Labrador.



Innu designs shown here and on pages 5, 10, 13, and 16, feature the traditional double curve motif used in Northeastern Algonkian art. The designs were traditionally painted on caribou skin hunting jackets and hats used by the hunters of far-northern Labrador.

by Manimat Hurley

"Standing Up"

Thirty-one-year-old Manimat Hurley has done something heroic in her fight to stop the illegal use of her people's land by Canada's Department of National Defence. The shy, soft-spoken mother of three spent 52 days in jail after she and four other Innu walked onto the runway and in front of a Dutch F-16 at Canadian Forces Bay, Goose Bay in September 1989. Hundreds of Innu from Manimat's hometown of Sheshatshit, [Labrador], have done the same thing to protest jet bomber training over Innu land, but Canadian authorities felt Manimat had done it once too often. Her long weeks in jail were severe punishment for her efforts to stop the low-level flights. Manimat kept a diary that explains what motivated her to make such sacrifices for her people. The first excerpts were written while she was in "nutshimit" (the bush) in the spring:

May 24, 1989

I am here with my family and it is very good for every one of us to feel the closeness of each other. We care and love each other and being united with the people makes us feel strong.... In the village, that's where we see people divided. You can tell the difference because in the village we see different kinds of problems and everyone must know that alcohol is to be blamed for all of this. It makes us weak and takes our power.

May 25, 1989

This morning we saw loons on the water and my brother shot one. My nephew ran over to where the canoe was coming ashore. He was proud when my brother passed the loon over to him to take to the camp where his grandmother was.... From what I see around the campsite people are enjoying being here in Minipi Lake. I often ask questions to myself: Is it wrong for the Innu people to walk in the footsteps of our grandfathers, grandmothers, ancestors? Is it wrong for us to continue practicing the Innu way of life? If a NATO base is established in Goose Bay, it will destroy the Innu and their culture. Everything they once loved will be a whole mess with war toys all over the land.

**"My dearest little ones,...
don't ever feel that what I did
was wrong. I did it mostly for
you children. I want to see you
grow up and be proud of
yourselves and our identity.
No one has the right to destroy
our culture. That is the reason I
am in here today...
Always stand tall and have
pride in yourselves...."**

changing but we can't be changed into another people. We have to protect our identity and pass it on from generation to generation. It isn't right how we are being manipulated. So that is the reason we want to fight back....

September 28, 1989 (to her children)

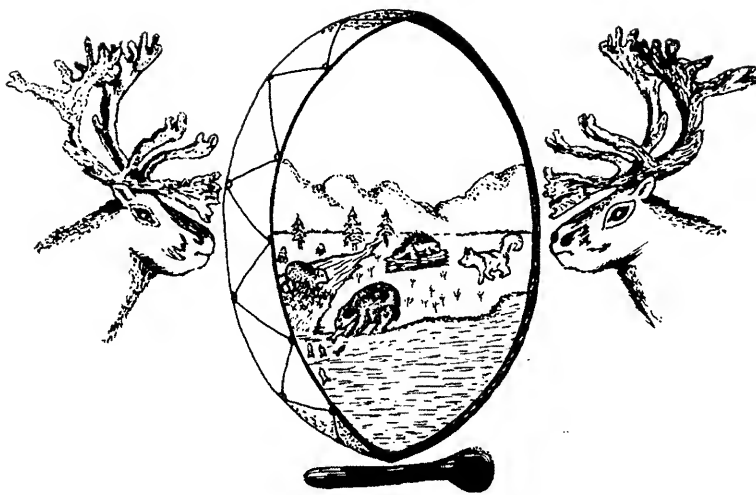
My dearest little ones,... don't ever feel that what I did was wrong. I did it mostly for you children. I want to see you grow up and be proud of yourselves and our identity. No one has the right to destroy our culture. That is the reason I am in here today... Always stand tall and have pride in yourselves.... It is a hard and difficult sacrifice I have to go through for Nitassinan, but that is what keeps me going all day—thinking of you children and the future... Ever since I am in here I always wondered why people with dark skins have to be treated differently... Why is it that we have to be put down like we don't exist?

October 15, 1989

I am 29 years old today. I have to be in prison for my birthday. I wish I was home so I could celebrate my birthday with my family. I miss them so much. I hope I will see them soon.

Manimat was finally released from prison November 6, 1989 but her legal ordeal was not over yet. She and over 100 other Innu went to trial for mischief charges in February 1990. This began more than a year of Innu effectively thwarting the courts by simple non-cooperation: refusal to participate, refusal to speak English, refusal to provide translation. In the end, all charges were dropped save one. Manimat's cousin was the one symbolic Innu protester found guilty and sentenced to one day in jail. Manimat continues to struggle for freedom for her people. In May 1990, a decision was made not to build a NATO Training Centre in Goose Bay, but low level flights continue despite this decision. The military announced an increase of 33 percent in numbers of jets this year.

Manimat Hurley, an Innu woman from Sheshatshit, is presently working as a kindergarten teacher in the local school. She and her husband have three children, and she hopes to spend several months in the bush with them this spring. Manimat also supports her people in their resistance against other threats to their land, whether that be at a Federal-Provincial negotiating table or on a blockade.



This sketch, by Christine Poker, is used on the letterhead of the band council of Utshimassits (David Inlet, Labrador). Poker, who helps teach second grade in the local school, is fond of drawing and painting the Innu world around her—the country, her newborn, a drum, or the caribou that are so central to her people.

From Jail — September 22, 1989

I will never forget what happened this morning. I was very tired and didn't know what to expect. My head is still aching from the crying I did after court. I didn't expect to be released, but I thought they would give me an option to choose.... Instead I have to wait until October until our trial date.... I hope and pray to God that someone will understand our struggle for Nitassinan {Innu word for their land}. We want to save the land for our children and their children to come in the future.... If all the land is being destroyed then we have no culture. We can't practice our way of life in the village because that is not the way our grandparents taught us.

September 23, 1989

I just hope my children never have to go through what I am going through at this moment. We all know that times are

"I want my children and grandchildren to go to the country to keep learning how to live there. My parents always said I had to know how to live in the country so I could pass it on to my children so they can do the same. The only way I can do this is to keep taking my family to the country."

Memories of Nishet [Pokue] Penashue

Translated by daughter Germaine in conversation with Louise Cober Bauman after she and her family spent over a month in the country with Nishet and her family.

I was born over 60 years ago by a lake about 50 miles up the Goose River in Nitassinan, our name for Labrador and the north shore of Quebec. Mani Pasteen and my grandmother delivered me. I had many brothers. Some died and I cannot remember all of them, but there must have been close to 20. There were only three sisters, Shanimen, Manikanet and me.

As I was growing up, I lived with my family in a canvas tent. We used to travel by canoe or small boat, and dog sled in the winter, hundreds of miles. We followed the caribou, and also hunted porcupine, beaver, and other birds and animals.

We care a lot for our land and all the animals, especially the caribou. We must burn the bones, we must never burn the skin when we are smoking it.... Something bad would happen if we burned the skin. I believe the caribou have their own government or power, just like other animals and fish. These governments must be respected.

After killing caribou, we would have mukushan, a feast. My father would play the drum, and we would dance. Old women would dance first; my mother was the first one to dance. My parents would sing and dance. It would be a party for everyone, but there would be no beer. When I was young the old people sometimes used to make home brew, but I never drank; I never wanted to.

There were usually several other tents in our camp. My grandparents were always with us and also my aunts and uncles. Each summer we would travel to the coast, to Sheshatshit, for about two months. We would buy supplies, visit with friends, and then marriages and baptisms took place as the priest would also be present. In September we would again return to nutshimit (the country), returning to Sheshatshit at Christmas for a short time if we needed supplies.

I never talked back to my father. He said I would have grey hair if I listened and treated him well. It is a good sign to have grey hair, and now I have grey hair! Because I listened

to my father I got strength and I learned to be responsible for the caribou bones, to be careful with them and not to give them to the dogs. I still feel this strength in the country.

When I was 17 my father and Pien's father arranged for us to be married. Four or five of our 14 children died, plus we adopted three other children. Most of our children were born in the country.

I never went to school, but I learned a lot from my grandparents. We never got family allowance.... We got "country family allowance"—furs. When I had my own kids, the older ones went to school, but the others didn't want to go, so we never forced them. Of course we never got family allowance because of that, but I didn't really think it was important because we never had it when we were young.

We started to stay in the community more when my father got a house about 18 or 20 years ago, but it was better in the country. Today kids don't listen or do as they are told. Here in the community they have learned things they would not learn in the country, and beer changes things too.

One time in the country, I remember we had nothing to eat. Then my father told Pien and his brother Jerome where to go hunting. My father was a man who followed his dreams. When he told them where to hunt, they found something to eat. My family believes in their dreams and some other people in the community do too, but some don't. Some kids are very mixed up, but others believe what the elders say.

I want my children and grandchildren to go to the country to keep learning how to live there. My parents always said I had to know how to live in the country so I could pass it on to my children so they can do the same. The only way I can do this is to keep taking my family to the country.

When times are difficult, I feel an inner strength to help me go on. God gives me this strength. I always feel much stronger when I am in the country.

This man Columbus that you talk of—he says this is his land, that he discovered it. He is lying. I have never heard of him; he was never here. This is not his land.

Nishet Penashue is a 62 year old Innu woman who spends over half of her time living in the village of Sheshatshit, Labrador, though she much prefers to be in the country, spring and fall for several months. She and her husband Pien usually take many of their children and grandchildren with them into the country where life seems to be very healthy for them.

"Once among Mennonite women I had nothing to contribute to a conversation about old family recipes for Christmas cookies. I thought about my grandfather's grandmother, how she never made cookies, how she never had Christmas."

by Marie Pokue

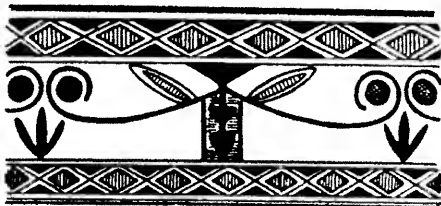
To The People I Lost

It's only a dream
I wish I could wake up
and see your faces again
When I lost you I thought I was dreaming
But it's not a dream, it's real.
You were all gone, and I'll never see you again.
But I'll see you someday when I leave this world.
I'm not ready yet,
there is a lot to do here on this world.
Without drinking alcohol.
You waste your lives because of alcohol
I'm trying very hard not to live the way you did.
Oh, I miss you all
I better learn more not to waste my life
like you did.

I see your faces in my dreams.
I talk to you in my dreams.
You talk to me in my dreams.

If only I could talk to you, and tell you again
not to drink, you could listen
I know you don't want to throw your life away
but something else is controlling your life.
You're not strong enough, you need someone beside you.
I know you can't do this alone. You didn't make it.
It's too late now.
But I'm here. I'm going to be strong.
I'll do it for you.

Marie Pokue is an Innu woman who lives in Utshimassits (Davis Inlet) on the north coast of Labrador. She lost her parents and most of her siblings in an alcohol-related boating accident when she was a youth. She currently works with the Family Violence Program in Utshimassits as a counselor-in-training.



by Beth Hege

On Being a Halfbreed

I used to hate the word "halfbreed." But it doesn't sting my ears anymore; I think there is something in my identity that is tied to this word. It is a hard word for a hard place.

In my family I have first cousins who are full-blooded American Indians and first cousins who are full-blooded German-descent Mennonites. I and my brothers are somewhere in between; members of the tribe and members of the church.

There was a time I wished all the halfbreeds in the world could come together and be our own race. It was a time when I was tired of questions about my race; I was tired of explaining why I have olive skin, high cheekbones and a German surname.

These are some moments from my life that told me I was a halfbreed, the hard-edged experiences that made me realize and accept the discomfort of the word.

As a child I wanted to belong to just one group. In grade school I tried to blend in with the Mexican children. I had dark skin too, but when I spoke, only English came out. Growing up I felt aware of the groups at school and that my mind and my skin alternately excluded me, to varying degrees, from each of these groups.

Once among Mennonite women I had nothing to contribute to a conversation about old family recipes for Christmas cookies. I thought about my grandfather's grandmother, how she never made cookies, how she never had Christmas.

When my Grandfather Eagle died I struggled with the idea of his afterlife. I could not imagine him in Heaven, at least not in the materialistic heaven with buildings and streets and gates that I had learned about in Sunday school. I have many questions about my ancestors.

One weekend after spending three days at a Hymnal Council meeting where I sang practically non-stop with the council members as they made decisions on the new hymnbook, I went to an inter-tribal powwow in Chicago. This was an acute confrontation with the parts of me. I experienced the music, tradition and spirituality of two very different and very

beautiful cultures in a short space of time, and at a time when I was questioning my identity a great deal. I felt a deep sense of familiarity to both worlds but not complete union with either.

Sometimes at powwows I felt guilty about being white, about not having grown up on the reservation. I felt critical eyes on me and that I wasn't "real," even though I am enrolled with my tribe. I have felt this same feeling among Anglos, who tend to want to quantify the percentage of Nez Perce blood in me. Native people tend not to ask this question. They ask, "Where are you from?"

For me, this continues to be a complicated answer. I am from the Nez Perce. I am from the Mennonites. I am Jacob and Elizabeth, Chief Joseph and Eagle Piatote. I am the Bitterroot Mountains and Bayern, I am Appaloosa horses and "Gott ist die Liebe." Spiritually, emotionally and physically, there is no one place I am from.

I have given up this idea that I can ever relate completely to one group of people, even to other halfbreeds. Ah, there is that word again: halfbreed. It is a hard word, one we feel bad about saying. But it captures a certain hard edge of mixed heritage, and it should exist to sting our hearts, if not our ears.

Beth Hege is a graduate student in the international studies department at the University of Oregon in Eugene. She grew up in Aberdeen, Idaho, not far from the Nez Perce ancestral lands of her Grandfather Eagle, and the First Mennonite Church, where her great-great-grandfather Hege pastored. She is 25 years old.


by Virginia Pesemapeo Bordeleau

A metis woman

I am the collision of two cultures
The White of concrete and steel
The Red of feathers, fur
and leather tanned by
acid wood smoke

I belong to a dispossessed race
A race seeking a country
I am the child of a woodsman
The Indians called "Abifibi"
With a high and clear voice

I am the child of a woman
They called a squaw
Speaking but one language
And with heavy silence
Her identity lost

I belong to poverty and baloney
To roast beaver and to bannock
I belong to beer, cheap wine
and magic potions

I belong to an ancient tongue
moving to the sound of drums, of skin
I belong to the soft language
of shared secrets
I also belong to colorful joul
And the beautiful French language
sometimes forked
But often wonderfully frank

I belong to chants, ancestral dances,
folklore and square dances
I belong to legends
where the gods were bears
I belong to jumble sales and the devil
smelling of sulphur

I belong to moccasins on snow
And rubber boots with holes
Muskeg and black asphalt
I belong to long treks,
expeditions and hunts
I belong to organized tours

I belong to shouts of joy
Of secular wisdom
Of pleasure and pain

I belong to promiscuity
and three children per bed
I belong to fierce pride
“Of comfort and indifference”

I belong to half-brothers killing themselves
In the silence of their reserves
I belong to the loud half-brothers
Who want their cake and eat it too

I am witness to two races
Weary of life
And of their inability to come together
I am the bridge between two peoples
A chance meeting has left to hang
Over a precipice

I am a tapestry of differences
Branded by the red-hot iron of paradox
I am of white and red stock

**Virginia Pesemapeo Bordeleau is a metis woman from Quebec.
This is reprinted from the June 1991 *Rencontre*, a Native
magazine printed in Quebec.**



Portrait of her sister, by Virginia Pesemapeo Bordeleau



Illustration courtesy Indian Friendship Centre, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

"So great was the abuse that many of our people have laid themselves beneath the earth, cutting short what could have been a gracious life—a life that should have known laughter, love and peace of mind. ...Sometimes I am numbed by the realization that today so few people know what happened in these residential schools and more so, that the majority of people do not even care."

by Linda Jaine

Iskwew: One of Many

When writing about what it is like to be an Indian woman I have forced myself to journey back in time. This has, in some ways, been helpful to me because I uncovered some feelings not previously acknowledged. But, I feel vulnerable sharing them with strangers. Although you may find that my life may not have been much different than many others, I am sharing my thoughts because I also believe that, in some way, it may increase our ability to understand each other. True understanding comes only from the heart, and words alone are difficult tools to work with but they are the only tools I have here at this time.

I was born February 16, 1954. I don't know my father, although I have been told his name. He knows that I have been born, but for whatever reason he has remained physically absent from my life. As a child I often dreamed he would appear one day and take me in his arms. He would tell me how unfortunate circumstances prevented him from being with me. But now everything would be okay. We would then laugh and go outside to play.

As I grew older, I believed that someday the phone would ring and a stranger would announce that he was my father. He would then tell me how I meant more than anything in the world to him but that unfortunate circumstances had prevented him from being with me. We would laugh and go to a movie together.

Now that I am thirty-seven I know my father will never appear, never call and never will I hear those words of endearment. Today it hardly matters. The pain he has caused me through his absence has partly shaped my character. It has helped me to accept responsibility for my actions; to be a good mother to my children and perhaps above all to realize that biological ties are not the true strength of a family. Rather the rite of fatherhood or motherhood is earned through dedication of love and grace.

There was a man who my mother married. I call him Dad. He never accepted me as a daughter although he did keep a roof over our head and food on the table. Until the day he died, I always hoped he would love me but that never happened.

My mother is Cree. She never taught me her language nor my history. As a child I was beaten and shamed. I have worked

There is little doubt that the federal government regarded the Indian residential schools as a key weapon in a long-term plan to destroy all vestiges of the Indian culture. Some children were kept in the schools for several years at a time, with no holidays and no contact with their parents or their home communities. An official report in 1913 by an agent of the Indian Affairs

Department made it clear that the schools were part of a systematic long-term plan. "It is considered by many that the ultimate destiny of the Indian will be to lose his identity as an Indian, so that he will take his place fairly and evenly beside his white brother," the agent wrote.

—Jeffrey York,
The Dispossessed

hard to love her, just as she has worked hard to love. There have been times when I hated her, times when I felt sorry for her and times when I felt proud of her strength and endurance. Her life has been a constant struggle. She lost her mother in adolescence, and was forced to stay in residential school. There she was abused by the very people who sang songs of love to God and mankind. Their language was so different from their actions. This has caused thousands of Indian children to hate themselves.

So great was the abuse that many of our people have laid themselves beneath the earth, cutting short what could have been a gracious life—a life that should have known laughter, love and peace of mind. Many who left residential school went on to abuse themselves and others. Their childhood destroyed, they were left with few opportunities to realize that living is more than being on the edge of death. Sometimes I am numbed by the realization that today so few people know what happened in these residential schools and more so, that the majority of people do not even care.

My mother is now 64 years old. She bakes bread. I don't. My mother knits and crochets baby blankets and doll's clothes for other people's children. I don't. My mother helps old people when they need to go to the doctor. She nurses them, spends time with them and lets them know they matter. When she has money she spends it on other people. When she is given something pretty or nice she gives it away. She rarely keeps anything for herself. She rarely talks about residential school, but I do because I love my mom.

Even though I never attended residential school, I am a product of it. Although church-run residential schools are gone, the lives so selfishly damaged there are not a thing of the past. The abuses my mother suffered have caused me in turn to suffer. My aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends have also endured tremendous psychological, physical and spiritual pain. It will only begin to end when others, like yourself, not only listen but take action in concert with indigenous peoples.

There have been many hurtful occurrences in my past. The first time I realized I was really different from others was in grade one. I was sitting at my desk holding a large round pencil. We were practicing printing. The question we were to print between those wide lines was "What color are you?" It struck me at that moment that I was brown and everyone else was white. Coloring pictures reinforced my realization. The pinkish crayons were "flesh" but it was not my color; the brown crayons were my color.

Do you remember Dick, Jane, Sally, Zeke the gardener, Puff and Spot? My life in no way resembled theirs. Dad did not go out to work while mom stayed home happy to care for others. In fact my dad stayed home and cut wood in the town pasture so we would have some heat in the winter. Mom left for weeks at a time and when she came home it was to recuperate from drinking. We did not have a gardener. We did have large gardens though. In the fall dad would take the excess produce to the local store and get credit for items we could not grow. And of course none of us had pretty clothes or blonde hair. We were dark haired, dark eyed, dark skinned and wore hand-me-downs. Nine of us lived in a two-bedroom house and we had rats in the woodpile. We could never afford to feed another mouth, especially a dog; as for Puff.... well I imagine the rats would have had a fine dinner one day.

That is some of what I learned about being Indian inside the school. Outside in the school yard life was not so refined. The last time I heard someone call me a squaw to my face, was in grade nine. But as I have heard people so often say "Kids will be kids" and the "past is the past." Or is it?

When I was 12 mom and dad divorced and I was placed in a series of non-indigenous foster homes until I was 16. These were gruesome times, and I still need to come to terms with the way I was treated. Anyway, when I was 15, I began hanging around the Friendship Center in the city. There I met two elder Indian men. They took me under their wing and for the first time in my life I began to learn the traditional teachings of my culture.

As time passed I began to realize I did have roots. These roots were stationed on an ancient way of life that encompassed a philosophy of caring and giving. It was not an easy way of life because the door to it is in knowing yourself and being proud of who you are. It took me a long time to even find the doorknob! But these two older men were patient, and I was allowed time to find my way. I was sad when they died.

When I was 19 I met another Indian man who became my husband. The first time we were alone together he asked me if I would marry him. I consented. The next day we went to ask my mother and she consented. While we prepared for our wedding, we got to know each other. This part may have been unnecessary because I felt, and still do feel, that I have always known him. We were married on the reserve in a traditional manner. Fifteen months later he died in an accident.

Throughout the time we were physically together I began to

"We have, as indigenous peoples, been severely oppressed and it continues. Although the laws and general racist attitudes are not so blatant anymore, the damaging effects have not subsided. The majority of indigenous women live well below the poverty line. Systemic discrimination is

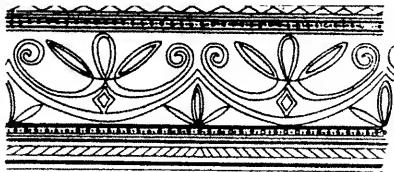
often a barrier to employment. Many indigenous children attend school hungry. Often they do not have decent clothing or decent housing. "

realize there are alternate realities. The space we occupy on earth is for a purpose, but it is only one small portion of a longer journey. However, I knew at that time that I was not capable of embarking on anything further than going to the store. My baggage from the past was heavy and I was not strong.

I have been fortunate to meet other Indian people who have helped me lessen my load. With patience and kindness they have helped me to be proud of who I am. You will find these people in the Sweat Lodge as well as on blockades. If you really listen to what they are saying, you will hear that they are fighting to remain Indian and will do whatever it takes to remain that way.

As I learned from them I also learned about myself. I am proud of being Indian. I am proud of being a woman. Being an Indian woman and who I am gives me pleasure. I am particularly happy when I am with other Indian people like me. At these times I have the freedom to just be me.

So often when I am with non-indigenous people I am perceived as just an Indian; not as another person who happens to be of another race. For instance, inevitably when I attend a non-indigenous social function, the question of my race arises. The question may be blunt: "Are you Indian?" or it may be less direct: "What nationality are you?" After I answer that I am Cree, I am either told a story about the person's relationship to an Indian or Indians. I also don't think I have ever left a social function without someone trying to talk about "the Indian problem" of the past or today. I realize that there are caring, non-indigenous people who are genuinely concerned, but I wonder why I can't also be seen as a person. Indian people are more than just Indians; we go to movies, listen to all kinds of music, read the paper and



enjoy a conversation about other matters in the world. It is my desire that someday at one of these functions a non-indigenous person will ask me about something as general as what kind of flowers I enjoy growing in my garden. This may sound trite but it is an issue of importance to me, because it is one way of removing the color barrier.

We have, as indigenous peoples, been severely oppressed and it continues. Although the laws and general racist attitudes are not so blatant anymore, the damaging effects have not subsided. The majority of indigenous women live well below the poverty line. Systemic discrimination is often a barrier to employment. Many indigenous children attend school hungry. Often they do not have decent clothing or decent housing. But is it their fault? I say no.

In too many cases, like my own, Indian parents had few choices. Laws were passed which were blatantly discriminatory against Indian people. In the residential school era, children were literally torn from their parent's arms and placed in institutions where children were psychologically, physically and sexually abused. These children were not shown love. Their culture was not honored. Instead they were taught to hate themselves. I no longer blame my mother for the way she treated me. But I do believe that all members of contemporary society must accept some responsibility for what has happened.

I feel that we all need to accept responsibility for helping to create a space on this earth in which all peoples can live in peaceful co-existence. If there is any desire on your part to really understand what it is like to be an Indian woman, then I say: make the effort to meet one. Better yet, get acquainted with several. This way you will best realize that all human beings are not that different from one another. No matter what our race we want to be happy, healthy and to enjoy life. We love our children and our families. The manner in which we find our happiness, health or the way we raise our children or structure our families may be philosophically different than yours, but it is our way.

Problems will not cease to exist until we learn how to effectively work together. I suggest that this process be one of promoting respect for one another as individuals and as cultures. It is important to honor others as you would like to be honored.

Linda Jaine, Cree, is from Saskatchewan. She is the mother of two daughters, Kaitlin and Amara. She is also the coordinator of the Indigenous Peoples Program, Extension Division, University of Saskatchewan.



by Rose Gregoire

I'm Only a Child

*Deep inside me, I've been hurt.
I guess from the time when I was young,
I've been wanting to shout and scream,
to shake people.*

Please, comfort me, hold me, love me.
I want to tell you my secret
It's true.
I am telling the truth
Please hold me; tell me I didn't do anything wrong.
I want to hear you say I'm not a bad child
Tell me it's not my fault.

Please apologize to me
Tell me you're sorry for not protecting me
For not loving me.
Say that you love me, no matter what
Hold me.

Please don't fight between you and Dad
about what happened.
It hurts so much
and still hurts.

To clothe me and to feed me
is not enough.
I want you to love me, believe me, hold me,
love me.

I'm only a child.
I don't have the physical strength
to protect myself from being hurt.
I need you.

I'm only a child.
I don't know what is right or wrong
if you are not there for me to learn.

I'm only a child. I cannot do things for myself
I need you to be there with me, spend time with me.
Teach me how to pray to Jesus.
Teach me about my great-great-great grandparents.
Teach me about my culture.
I want to know who I am.
Teach me to be proud of who I am...
Teach me about love, so later on
I'll be a loving person.

I'm only a child.
I need to know you in a loving way.
It hurts when I'm alone with a stranger
I'm afraid.
Please don't leave me
I need you.
Sleep close with me, protect me, hold me
Remember, I'm only a child.
Laugh with me, play with me, do things with me.
Take me with you. I want to love you
but I need you to learn that.

Please don't hurt me
My body is small, very innocent
It hurts.
Please don't let me be confused.
I just want you to hold me and love me.
Please let me trust you.
Remember, I'm only a child.

Rose Gregoire, an Innu woman of Sheshatshit, Labrador, has four children. She works in the community as a Family Support Worker. Rose has been actively involved in the Innu resistance against the military in the past. As a survivor of sexual abuse, Rose finds writing is an important tool for her own inner healing.

"She called in a few minutes and I was talking to my own daughter for the first time since she was taken away as a baby! I was so happy to hear from her. I was very emotional. I didn't know Elizabeth was looking for me. But she found me first, and I was trying to find my brother Bernard!"

Indian and Metis communities had virtually no control over the children who were seized from their homes. Until 1976, there was not a single Native-controlled child welfare agency in Manitoba. Decisions about the future of Native children were made by white social workers and urban-based bureaucrats.

—Jeffrey York,
The Dispossessed

by Suzanne Riche Gregoire

Finding The Lost Family

It was during the winter of 1972 when he was three years old, that Social Services took my youngest brother away for good. I was present when this all happened. My mother was also there. I may have been 16 or 17. The social worker and an Innu translator came. The social worker told me she was only going to take Bernard to the hospital and bring him right back. My mother and I wanted to come along with the social worker. But when she took my brother, that was the last time I ever saw him.

When the social worker didn't bring my brother back the next day, my mother went to see what she had done to Bernard. The social worker had already sent Bernard away for adoption. My mother was just told she was an unfit mother, that she couldn't take care of him because she was drinking all the time. She was not even told where they had taken Bernard. My father was not in Sheshatshit; he was incarcerated in St. John's at that time. That was the first one of my family the Social Services took away from us.

I got pregnant and had a baby girl, Elizabeth, born on November 12, 1972. I gave my baby to my mother. Again the same thing happened. It was the same social worker who came and took my baby away from my mother; she was told the same thing. My daughter was only 2 1/2 months old when I last saw her. I was going out with Toby already when all this was taking place, but he was away in prison.

My parents moved back to Davis Inlet, another Innu community up the coast. I have been living with Toby ever since then. We got married in 1988; we had five girls and one boy. But I have never forgotten my brother Bernard. My mother died seven years ago. I cried for Bernard; oh I wish he had known and seen our mother.

After a while I still could not forget my brother, so my husband and I went to see the Social Services to see if they could locate him. They wrote a letter for us to a social worker in St. John's who told us it would take six months before we heard anything. I was very anxious and could not wait that long. In a month we went to see them again, but no luck. The Social Services were not much help and I gave up all hope. In my mind I felt I was going to have to wait forever.



Illustration by Tabea Murphy, showing a Labrador Inuit family in late 19th century or early 1900s. She writes, "The woman's hairdo is what I remember of my grandmother. All the men had that hairstyle. All the little girls had braids." Murphy is an Inuit woman born in Nain, Labrador. She is mother of four children and two foster children, is active in the Moravian Church, and volunteers for the local Health Committee and Crime Prevention Group.

But something else exciting happened. One evening I was home when a neighbor phoned and asked, "Do you have a daughter named Elizabeth Riche?" I answered right away, "Yes." She said, "Elizabeth called me a few minutes ago and asked about you." She then gave Elizabeth my phone number, and I waited for Elizabeth to call me.

She called in a few minutes and I was talking to my own daughter for the first time since she was taken away as a baby! I was so happy to hear from her. I was very emotional. I didn't know Elizabeth was looking for me. But she found me first, and I was trying to find my brother Bernard!

A few months later on a Sunday evening, we came home from bingo and were getting ready to go to bed. The kids were in the living room with the radio on when our niece suddenly called out to us and said my sister in St. John's was on the radio. My sister had also been trying to locate our brother. She had gone to Social Services but no luck. So, she was trying it this way. She figured somebody would listen

By the early 1980s, about 40 to 60 percent of all children removed from their natural families in western Canada were Indian or Metis. In the rest of Canada, the percentage was lower—but only because the Native population was much lower. In Ontario, only 2 percent of the population was Indian or Metis, but 8 percent of the children in the child welfare system were native. For the country as a whole, aboriginal children were being

taken from their families almost five times more frequently than non-Native children. By 1980, about 15,000 Native children were under the control of child welfare agencies across Canada, and three-quarters of all adopted Indian children were placed in non-Native homes.
—Jeffrey York,
The Dispossessed

A culture cannot survive without its language. The language is an expression of the culture—it is the backbone, the identity of the people. When the language is lost, the culture is crippled. Today, it is estimated that 50 of Canada's 53 Native languages are in danger of extinction. Thirteen languages are considered extremely endangered because they are spoken by fewer than

a hundred people. Once they disappear, they will be gone forever. There are no foreign countries where the languages will be preserved.
—Jeffrey York,
The Dispossessed

and help her locate her brother, so she gave her phone number to the man on the air.

In Stephenville a woman was listening to the same program, and heard my sister talking about her brother Bernard Riche. This woman was Bernard's foster mother. Bernard's date of birth matched, so she knew it was the same Bernard she adopted when he was three years old. She immediately called Bernard in Ontario and told him his sister was looking for him, and Bernard called the radio program. The man on the radio called my sister on the air, and I listened to my brother for the first time in 19 years!

I was crying with happiness. Bernard and my sister were talking to each other, but she didn't know that her older sister was also listening from Sheshatshit, and crying. The next day she sent a message to me on our community radio station to phone her, saying it was very important. I called and said, "I know what you are going to tell me. I heard you and Bernard. I am so happy."

She also said Bernard would be coming to St. John's on December 27 to meet our family. My father and brother Joe couldn't make it, but my husband and I went to St. John's that day. At the airport were my daughter Elizabeth and her boyfriend Craig—the first time I have seen my daughter face to face in almost 20 years! She was just a baby before; now she was a full grown young lady and beautiful. I was full of joy; I didn't know what to say to her, but I love her so much.

That same evening, all of us were waiting for Bernard to come by bus. About 1 a.m. the taxi came to the apartment and Bernard walked in. I was the happiest person on earth to see my brother—my brother taken away 19 long years ago. It was a very emotional situation for the three of us. He is all grown up now, 22 years of age. I thank God for this reunion. It is the biggest present I ever had for Christmas.

I have met my brother and my daughter, and I am just a happy person now. I feel very different inside.

Suzanne Riche Gregoire lives in Sheshatshit, and is now eager to locate her son Scott, the third and last member of her family taken from them. She writes this story to give hope to all others who are still looking for their children.

by Rita Joe

I Lost My Talk

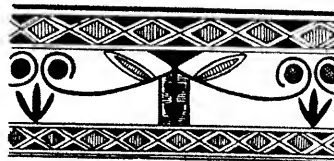
I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie school.

You snatched it away:
I speak like you
I think like you
I create like you
The scrambled ballad, about my world.

Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me.

Rita Joe is a Micmac woman from Eskasoni, Nova Scotia. She has spent much of the last 22 years writing in an effort to change the images of her people. Her four books and numerous other poems are also a strong encouragement to her own people to see the beauty in themselves. Reprinted with permission from: Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme, "Native Women," Vol. 10, Nos. 2 and 3 (Summer/Fall 1989).



Resources

Koning, Hans. "Columbus: His Enterprise, Exploding the Myth." *Monthly Review Press*, 1991

A biography of the true history of Columbus' life and voyages. The author shows how Columbus' "discovery" led to the enrichment of the conquerors through the plunder and murder of the Native peoples of the Americas.

"Native Woman." Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme, Vol. 10 Nos. 2&3 (Summer/Fall 1989), c/o York University, 212 Founders College, 4700 Keele St., Downview, Ontario, M3J 1P3.

Includes Native women telling their stories under the following topics: Grandmothers, History and Tradition, Language, Problem Solving, Health, Careers/Futures.

"Resource Reading List 1990." Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with Native Peoples, P.O. Box 574 Stn. P, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2T1.

This catalog includes an annotated bibliography of resources by and about Native people.

Silman, Janet. *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Woman Speak Out*. Women's Press, 1987.

Personal narratives of women from Tobique Reserve in New Brunswick describing their successful struggle to regain their birthright.

Wadden, Marie. *Nitassinan - The Innu Struggle to Reclaim Their Homeland*. Douglas & McIntyre, 1991.

This book provides a full account of the Innu struggle against the military low level flights across their land. It is a helpful tool to understand one people's situation, and their fight for justice.

York, Jeffrey. *The Dispossessed*. Lester & Orpen-Dennis Ltd.: 1989.

This book provides an opportunity to focus on the major issues facing Native people today.

Letters

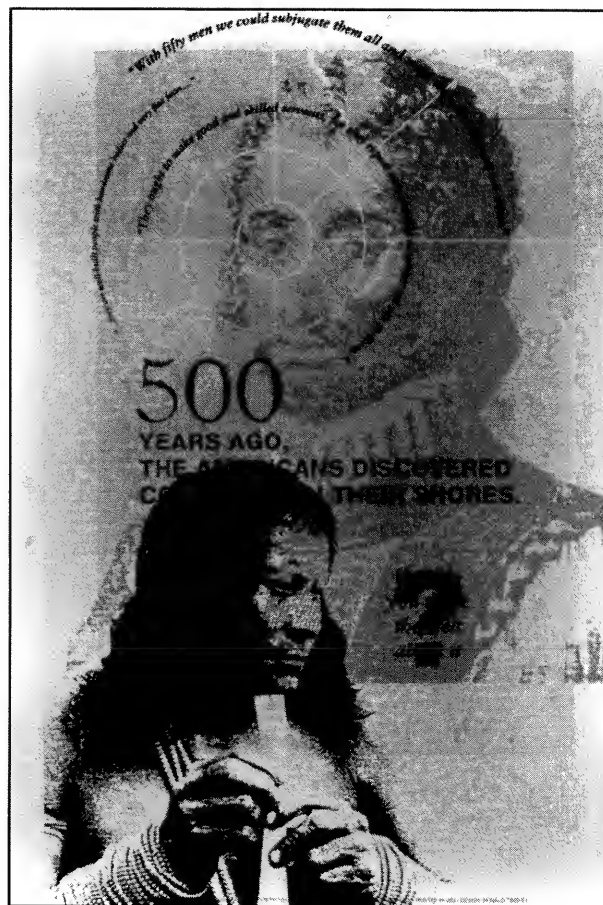
- I wanted to let your office know that the whole Labrador MCC team shared the issue on family/overseas assignment (Jan.-Feb. 1992 issue) and we all thought it was excellent. You really tackled the issues of concern to families, and the humor plus the information/insights was a good blend.
—Carrie Koplinka-Loehr, MCC Labrador
- I wanted to write you a quick note to let you know how much I appreciated the Jan.-Feb. Women's Concerns Report about "Parenting in a Cross-cultural Setting." Our oldest son, age four and a half, has been quite slow in picking up the Indonesian language in the two years that we've been here. It helped me to read that other MCC kids have similar problems; not all kids pick up language effortlessly. His lack of Indonesian playmates has been a concern which, after reading *Report*, I realize is natural considering he has North American playmates. However, I've been encouraged to try to help him seek out Indonesian friends as well. Parenting in any culture is a sometimes almost overwhelming task. In a cross-cultural setting parents face even more challenges. Thanks for a great issue dealing with some of these.
—Sharen Swartzentruber, Irian Jaya, Indonesia
- It has been a long time I have wanted to write to you, to express my profound appreciation for *Report*, and to affirm you in the work you are doing. In my journey, it means a great deal to hear women's voices from around the world who share my hopes and concerns. Every issue is uplifting. The recent piece on "Parenting in a Cross-cultural Setting" was a wonderful piece of dialogue for me! I also pass *Report* on to several other women.
—Elfrieda Lepp-Kaethler, Filadelfia, Chaco, Paraguay
- I am a seminary student at Princeton Theological Seminary. A friend gave us your *Report* on sexuality (March-April 1992). It was well done and thoughtful. I especially liked the article by Heggen. As my daughter in college would like to keep the copy we have, I was wondering if you might have a spare for my files.
—Brian Heath, Princeton, N.J.
- Great issue! (March-April 1992 on Sexuality). The articles are excellent and I love the drawings. Keep up the good work.
—Bruce Glick, Kidron, Ohio

- I read the *Women's Concerns* with interest. It has an awareness edge as well as a healing effect for women who through the years were not welcome to express their opinions. I have an idea for a topic you could cover. It seems to me that over the years the poor salary and overwork that we heap on pastors, church workers, church administrators and teachers, has an adverse affect on their families. I wonder if an issue could be devoted to that concern.

—Helen Kruger, Osler, Sask.

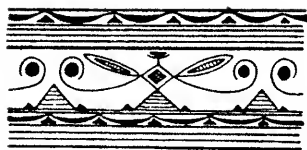
New and Verbs

- **Anne Chamberlain** of Hershey, Pa., and **Betty Sommer** of Bluffton, Ohio, are new members to the MCC U.S. Committee on Women's Concerns (CWC). Chamberlain, new Brethren in Christ representative, is a mental health counselor at Harrisburg (Pa.) Area Psychological Services. Sommer, General Conference representative, is a member of the social work faculty at Bluffton College. The committee gives direction to the U.S. CWC staff person and, together with the Canadian CWC, selects topics for *Women's Concerns Report*.
- "A common history: Different perspectives" is an MCC packet on **Columbus' discovery of the Americas**, as seen through the eyes of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ people in five countries. It contains articles from a Native Canadian, Native American, Latin American, African-American, Jamaican and Spaniard. To order the 67-page packet send \$5 to MCC, Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.
- "In a Mennonite Voice: **Women Doing Theology**" was the theme of a conference at Conrad Grebel College, April 30-May 2. About 190 people attended the conference, sponsored by MCC Canada Women's Concerns and the college. Papers from the conference were printed in the *Conrad Grebel Review*. The November-December 1992 issue of *Women's Concerns Report* will feature a report of the conference.
- **The premiere of "Birthstory,"** a new work with music by Carol Ann Weaver and poetry by Judith Miller, was held in March at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ont. The work centers on women's stories of birthing. It blends taped voices of mothers and a midwife, with poetry and instrumental interludes.



This 11"x17" MCC poster was designed by graphic artist Ronald Tinsley. The poster features quotes from the log of Christopher Columbus circling his head: "With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want... They are well-built people with handsome bodies and very fine faces... They ought to make good and skilled servants, for they repeat very quickly whatever we say to them." Single copies are available free, from any MCC office.

- "Women's Life Stories" was the theme for a May 8-9 **women's retreat in Waterdown, Ont.**, sponsored by the Women's Concerns Committee of MCC Ontario and the Peace and Social Concerns Committee. The program included biblical, Anabaptist and Mennonite women's stories.
- A **"Consultation on Women in Leadership,"** sponsored by the Women in Leadership Subcommittee of the Leadership Council of the Lancaster Mennonite Confer



ence, was held in New Holland, Pa., May 9. George R. Brunk III, dean of Eastern Mennonite Seminary, was featured speaker. He presented two biblical views concerning the role of women in congregational leadership. About 135 attended.

- Bek Linsenmeyer of Inman, Kan., is **new editor of *Window to Mission***, the quarterly publication of Women in Mission, General Conference. She succeeds Lois Deckert of Newton, Kan.
- **Resource on families going overseas**—The January-February issue of *Women's Concerns Report* identified the book *Sojourners: The Family on the Move* as a resource on cross-cultural parenting, but neglected to give ordering information. This helpful workbook is designed to prepare families planning to live overseas. It

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is edited by Kristina Mast Burnett. Layout by Janice Wiebe Ollenburger. Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Kristina Mast Burnett, Women's Concerns, MCC, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

U.S. residents may send subscriptions to the above address. Canadian residents may send subscriptions to MCC Canada, 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1. A donation of \$10 per year per subscription is suggested.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

is available from Associates of Urbanus, the publishing arm of Missionary Internship. Send \$10.82 U.S. plus \$2.50 for postage and handling to P.O. Box 457, Farmington, MI 48332. Michigan residents add 4% tax.

- Women in Mission (WM) enabled **two women to complete theological studies** in 1991. Carmen Chen completed two years at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries last May. She and her husband Vincent are serving a Taiwanese Mennonite Church in Argentina. WM contributed about \$5,114 for her education. Amanda Falls completed two years of theological and English studies in December 1991. She is the first Hispanic women in the General Conference to receive such studies. WM contributed about \$7,750 for her education. WM is funded by General Conference church women.
- **Lucy Vance was honored** at a retirement and farewell dinner at Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church in New York City April 4. The church was begun in 1954; Lucy taught summer Bible school there in 1955 and became an active member of the congregation. She has filled many roles at the church and in the community. She started and administered a Headstart Program there from 1969-1991. She served as a member of the Staten Island Girls Home, on the Heartease Home board of directors from 1974 to the present, and has been active in Camp Deepark Association. She moved to Harrisonburg, Va., in April.
- Dorothy Yoder Nyce of Goshen, Ind., received \$700 from the Frank H. Epp Memorial Fund toward her project of editing a **book about global women**.



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**

2nd Class

POSTAGE PAID

at Akron, PA

21 South 12th Street
PO Box 500
Akron, PA
17501-0500